



Foster Care

Information Pack

**BERRY
STREET**

Acknowledgement of Country

Berry Street acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands, skies, and waterways across Australia. We pay our deepest respects to Elders resting in the dreaming, to the Elders of today, and to the Elders to come, who will continue to care for, protect and nurture Traditional Lands.

Berry Street acknowledges Elders as the holders, educators, and protectors of cultural knowledge and wisdom. We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures date back 60,000 years and that sovereignty has never been ceded.

Berry Street has learnt that connection to countries, cultures, and communities facilitates pride in identity, resilience, and healing. We are committed to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in our care to connect to their heritages, languages, storytelling, dreaming, and songlines.

Berry Street acknowledges that we operate on stolen land and recognise the impact invasion and colonisation has had and continues to have on land, seas, and skies. We will remain committed to ensuring that all staff understand our true history as an organisation and nation.

It always was and always will be, Aboriginal land.



Contents

4	About Berry Street
5	What is foster care?
6	What are the types of foster care?
7	Why do we need foster carers?
8	Who can become a foster carer?
10	What is kinship care?
10	Supporting children in care to thrive
11	A therapeutic approach
14	We support reconciliation, diversity and inclusion
15	Berry Street's commitment to reconciliation
22	Berry Street's commitment to child safety
23	Step-by-step guide to becoming an accredited foster carer
25	Our foster care assessment process
27	Foster care placements and how they work
29	What is expected of Berry Street foster carers?
29	Advocacy
30	Victorian Foster Care Charter
31	Foster Carer Association of Victoria
31	Take the next step in your foster care journey
32	Contact us

About Berry Street

Throughout our existence, Berry Street has evolved.

In 1877, the organisation was founded by a group of women who were concerned about the high rates of infant mortality for pregnant females who were disadvantaged. Historically, our services have included hospitals, residency for women and their babies, adoption, and day care.

Over the past three decades, Berry Street has adapted to a changing world, cementing our position as one of the leading and innovative child and family services across the sector.

At Berry Street we work to courageously change lives and reimagine service systems. We believe in children, young people, families and their future – and that they should be safe, thriving, and hopeful. This belief is the heartbeat of our organisation.

Despite the positive changes we've seen, for some children, young people and their families, life is getting worse:

- more children are being removed from home than ever before
- more young people are disengaging from school
- 1 in 4 young Australians meet the criteria for psychological distress, and 15–24-year-olds have a higher proportion of mental health conditions than any other age group.

Our approach to foster care places the child at the heart of everything we do. For over 145 years, we've been supporting children and young people in Victoria at any point in their journey when they need help.

Childhood is a journey. Will you partner with Berry Street to support a child or young person?



Learn more about [Berry Street's story](#).



What is foster care?

The aim of foster care is to provide a nurturing home for children and young people, with the hope of safe reunification with the biological parents, when it's in the best interests of the child.

When children and young people are unable to live with their parents or other family, we are committed to providing safe and stable homes with supportive foster care families.

Most children and young people require foster care due to statutory Child Protection and Court intervention.



Learn more about the role of the [Children's Court](#).



What are the types of foster care?

Respite care

Respite carers provide foster, kinship, and other families in the community with support and the opportunity to take a break by caring for the child in their care. This is typically for one or two weekends a month, during school holidays, or as required.

Emergency care

Emergency care is immediate care, that can be provided due to significant safety or welfare concerns for a child or young person, or to assist a family in the community who needs emergency support. Given the immediate nature, this type of care is often arranged with short notice and may also occur overnight or on weekends. Often children and young people only remain with an emergency carer for a short time until more suitable arrangements can be made.

Short-term care

Short-term care is limited in time; it can range from overnight up to about six months. Children and young people requiring short-term care are often reunified with their parents or may be placed with extended family (kinship care) at the end of the foster care arrangement.

Long-term care

Long-term foster care is required when a child or young person cannot safely return home for some time (more than 6 months). Unless specified by the Children's Court, children in long-term care maintain contact with their families.

Permanent care

In some cases, the court decides it is not in the child or young person's best interests to consider reunification any longer and will issue a permanent care order for the child or young person. Permanent care isn't foster care, as foster care is a temporary arrangement that aims to reunite children with their birth parents. For some children, this isn't possible. In these instances, the child would spend some time in foster care before eventually being placed with a permanent care family.

Why do we need foster carers?

As a Berry Street foster carer, you'll be a part of a team that is committed to supporting children and young people who cannot live safely at home. By providing a safe and nurturing place to live – you'll be there for them at a crucial moment in their life.

Every night in Victoria, over 10,000 children and young people cannot live safely at home. Of these 2,000 are aged 0 to five years old.

The children and young people requiring foster care are diverse. Most children and young people will identify in a range of ways and come from a diversity of backgrounds. They range in age from birth up to 17 years, and come from various cultural, linguistic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds. They may also identify as LGBTIQ+ or be exploring their gender identity or sexual orientation and some may have a disability. Children and young people entering care may do so as a sibling group or individually.

Children and young people enter foster care when they can no longer safely live at home with their parents or family members. This can be for a variety of reasons such as abuse, neglect or living in a home with family violence. In some cases, families need help due to illness or unforeseen circumstances whereby the parents are unable to provide care for their child at home.

It is widely accepted that children and young people being placed in foster care experience greater levels of adversity and trauma compared to children and young people not in foster care.

Whether it's supporting a child to feel safe and build their trust in adults, exploring their interests and developing new hobbies, or encouraging a young person that their dreams are valid, being a Berry Street foster carer is a deeply meaningful and crucial role. And one to which each carer brings their unique life experience and skills to.

Who can become a foster carer?

There is no 'typical' Berry Street foster carer.

Many of our carers balance foster care with full-time employment. Some own their homes, while others rent. You might already be a parent with children living at home, or your children may have grown up and left home.

You don't need to have children yourself to become a foster carer but you'll need some experience interacting with and caring for children, whether that be through employment or babysitting for extended family or within the community.

Some carers are couples, some are single, and some provide foster care in a multigenerational household.

Just as every family is different, our foster carers come from diverse backgrounds and contexts.

Our foster carers:

- can be single, married or in a de facto relationship
- can be from LGBTIQ+ communities
- can come from any religion, spirituality, or nationality
- may or may not have children of their own
- can be in casual, part-time, or full-time work – or not at all
- live in a home they rent or own (can be a house, flat or shared household)



Eligibility requirements to become a foster carer

To be eligible to be a foster carer in Victoria, you must:

- be able to offer a safe, nurturing home environment for a child or young person
- be a minimum of 21 years of age
- have a spare bedroom
- be an Australian citizen or permanent resident (however, non-permanent residents can become foster carers for emergency and respite placements)
- be willing to complete and maintain relevant background compliance checks including a police check and Working with Children Check
- be willing to work as part of a team in the best interests of the child or young person
- have an interest in and commit to ongoing training and development to better support children and young people in care
- be willing to support a child or young person to maintain connection to family, community, and culture
- be willing to support a child or young person to explore their gender identity and/or sexual orientation and be inclusive of those who identify as being LGBTIQ+
- be willing to support a child or young person with a disability, for example someone who is neurodiverse, autistic or with a mild intellectual or physical disability



What is kinship care?

Though not foster care, kinship care refers to when a child or young person is cared for by extended family or friends within their community, allowing them to remain within their family or local network.

It is important to mention kinship care because for many children and young people it is preferable over foster care. However, foster carers still play a significant role for children and young people living out of home as they can provide respite care to kinship carers, further enhancing and enriching the child or young person's relationships and social connections.

Supporting children in care to thrive

For children and young people in foster care, they can achieve their full potential with the support of the Looking After Children framework. This framework has been implemented across Victoria with a focus on meeting each child or young person's day-to-day needs while in foster care. The framework is flexible enough to respond to the changing needs of children and young people throughout childhood.

There are seven key dimensions to the Looking After Children framework:

1. Health (including that a child or young person is meeting physical developmental milestones)
2. Emotional and behavioural development
3. Education
4. Family and social relationships
5. Identity
6. Social presentation (including self-esteem and self-confidence)
7. Self-care skills

Through meeting each childhood dimension, the aim is that children and young people in care will develop into well-adjusted and independent adults.

Berry Street will work with you and support you with tools, resources and strategies to assist in achieving the identified individual goals and milestones for the child or young person in your care.



Learn more about the [Looking After Children Framework](#).

A therapeutic approach

At Berry Street we take a therapeutic approach to foster care and recognise the trauma many children and young people have experienced due to challenging life situations. Often the difficult experiences these children have endured can lead to challenging and risk-taking behaviours. However, with the right ongoing support, guidance and links to protective factors, children and young people can heal from these early experiences.

Attachment

At the heart of all foster care placements and those affected by early years trauma, is the challenge of attachment – the human bond that provides security, consistency, predictability, and repetition.

For children and young people to develop a stable and secure attachment style they require their caregivers, typically parents, to respond to their distress signals consistently and reliably. Children and young people learn that their needs will be met when their caregivers respond appropriately to their signals such as crying, holding out their arms and seeking affection. However, for some children and young people, their signals go unmet, and this disrupts their ability to form secure attachments.

Our early relationships can impact our capacity to form relationships later in life and affect all areas of development including social, emotional, cultural, spiritual, and cognitive.

Children and young people in foster care have experienced higher rates of trauma and interrupted attachment than children not in foster care. This knowledge needs to remain paramount to ensure the children and young people in foster care are provided many opportunities to form consistent and stable relationships and connections with carers and reliable adults.



Learn more about the [attachment needs of children in foster care](#).

Trauma

In many cases, children and young people who have experienced trauma will have difficulty expressing, managing, and identifying emotions and as a result develop unsuitable strategies to cope. It is important to recognise that trauma is not confined to one-off events. It can also arise from a series of adverse experiences that have a cumulative impact.

Children and young people who have experienced trauma may display:

- avoidance of people, places, sounds or experiences to limit distressing thoughts and feelings
- anxiety
- low mood or depression
- anger
- difficulty trusting people
- risk taking behaviours

Berry Street takes a trauma-informed approach to caring for a child or young person who has experienced childhood trauma.

Being trauma-informed means acknowledging a child or young person's life experiences and being responsive to how these may negatively impact them. Trauma-informed care emphasises physical, psychological, and emotional safety. It focuses on the child or young person regaining a sense of control and feeling of empowerment.

The five key principles for trauma-informed care are:

1. Safety
2. Choice
3. Collaboration
4. Trust
5. Empowerment



Learn more about [trauma-informed foster care](#).

Recovery

Healing from trauma is possible, although the younger the child is when the trauma takes place, the longer healing is likely to take.

The most powerful vehicle for recovery is sustained positive relationships. While specialist trauma therapy can be very helpful in recovery, one of the best forms of recovery is positive day-to-day interactions.

Foster carers have a key role to play in a child or young person's recovery from trauma. Those daily, perhaps even mundane interactions foster carers have with a child or young person in their care offer countless therapeutic moments, so that the healing strategy can be lived out daily and in real time.

PACE Model

At Berry Street we promote the PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) model. Developed by Dr Daniel Hughes, PACE is a relationship-building approach that can help a child feel safer, more secure and cared for. PACE is a relational approach that teaches the child that adults can be trusted, and that tough times can be worked through together.



Learn more about [PACE](#).



We support reconciliation, diversity and inclusion

Berry Street's commitment to social justice is embedded in everything we do. We strive to deliver inclusive, responsive, and person-centred services for children, young people, and families from diverse communities.

Through our [Diversity and Inclusion Framework and Policy](#) we are working to remove the barriers to service access, improve cultural safety, and to drive the development and delivery of inclusive services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, LGBTIQ+ communities, people with disability and people from multicultural and multifaith communities.



Berry Street's commitment to reconciliation

Berry Street stands in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.


We are passionately committed to self-determination. We understand that Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) are best placed to hold authority, choice, power, and control within decision-making processes that relate to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Berry Street agree that to do this critical self-determined work, ACCOs must be appropriately resourced to meet the needs of community across the child and family services sector.

We believe that this supports healing and reconciliation as a nation.

While Berry Street embraces the principles that underpin self-determination, we recognise the responsibility of all agencies to ensure that services are culturally safe and welcoming to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, and communities. To do this work, we believe agencies and education services across the sector should be held to account, through the commitment of Reconciliation Australia's Reconciliation Action Plan program.

Currently, Berry Street holds two active Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs). Our Reflect RAP, and our Narragunnawali RAP. Through this work, our RAPs focus on our commitment to:

- actively support self-determination
- build cultural capability and cultural confidence across our programs
- embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the classroom, playground, and community
- establish and maintain an environment that is safe for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff and service users
- ensure cultural connection central to our care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
- amplify the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander voice, ensuring that it will continue to be heard, valued, respected and influential
- acknowledge our shared histories as an organisation and country
- support an anti-racist and ally active workforce
- acknowledge our responsibility to support all children, young people, and families we work with to recognise, embrace, and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.



As part of our RAP commitment to truth-telling, we continue to acknowledge the impacts of historical policies that resulted in separating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children. The detrimental impact of this continues to perpetrate injustices to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities today.

Statistics provided by the Australian Government inform us that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a greater morbidity and mortality rates than the wider population and are at an elevated risk. Chronic diseases that account for over 60% include mental health (social and emotional wellbeing) concerns, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and respiratory disease. Over 50% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples over 55 years' experience multi-morbidities. These health concerns place a significant burden on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities today.



To further understand these statistics and the implications of colonisation, please follow the links below:

- [Aboriginal life expectancy](#)
- [Aboriginal Mental Health](#)
- [Aboriginal mothers and children](#)
- [Aboriginal people with disability](#)
- [Aboriginal sexual health](#)
- [Diabetes](#)
- [Ear health](#)
- [Kidney disease](#)

Aboriginal children in out-of-home care

The rate of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care is the highest it's ever been. Community has labelled this era, another stolen generation. The 2021 Family Matters Report indicated that in 2019–2020 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children were:

- 5.3 times more likely to be reported to child protection authorities
- 10 times more like to be subject to a child protection order
- 10 times more likely to be living in out-of-home care

Berry Street is committed to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and their families across the child-welfare sector, we all have a role to play.

Berry Street is committed to truth-telling and transparency regarding our history in the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. We deeply regret failing to oppose these policies and recognise our part in this. We apologise for the devastating consequences this has had on multiple generations and are committed to learning from our mistakes.



To read more about our involvement, please read our [2021 Apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities](#).



Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families

The Victorian Government in partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) and non-Aboriginal Community Services Organisations (CSO) have committed to the self-determination and self-management for Aboriginal people in Victoria.

Legislation has been developed that will progressively see the responsibility for care and case management of Aboriginal children (subject to child protection) transition from CSOs and government to ACCOs.

An ACCO is an organisation that is established and operated by the Aboriginal Community. We recognise that ACCOs are best placed to support Aboriginal children and young people in care.

Find out how you can connect to your local ACCO by visiting [Fostering Connections](#).

While Berry Street supports self-determination, we recognise that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people may need to seek support from Berry Street. We are committed to ensuring that any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and families that we work with are culturally safe, meaning that there is no challenge or denial of identity or experience, and this extends to the children and young people we support in foster care.

Our foster carers play a crucial role in helping a child or young person build their identity, sense of self and wellbeing. All Berry Street foster carers undertake cultural awareness and cultural safety training to better equip them to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and to better understand the detrimental impacts of past policies.

If an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child or young person is placed in your care, our expectation would be that you would support that child or young person to develop or maintain a strong connection to country and connection to community.


Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are part of Australia's national identity.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's strong connection to family, land, language, and culture forms the foundation for social, economic, and individual wellbeing. This is integral to efforts to close the gap." - [National Indigenous Australian Agency](#)

A strong sense of cultural identity and knowledge amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people positively impacts social and emotional wellbeing, providing protective factors for young mob to process and heal from challenging life situations.



Learn more about [Berry Street's commitment to reconciliation](#).



Working with children and young people with multicultural and/or multifaith backgrounds

People from multicultural and/or multifaith backgrounds, particularly those with experiences as refugees or migrants, can experience a range of barriers in accessing services and receiving culturally safe support.

Whilst we should not make assumptions about a young person's connection or identification with a presumed culture or faith, it is good to explore with them what is important to them and then support them to be engaged and connected with these things. For children and young people from multicultural and/or multifaith backgrounds this support can include things like taking a young person to their local mosque or synagogue so that they can practice their faith. It might also include finding out more about their culture, the food they like to eat and the language they speak in their family of origin, so that you can best support their identity development and cultural connection.

Racism and race-based discrimination is also a reality for children and young people, and it is important to check in with children in your care about whether they are experiencing this. Racism can have an impact on their mental health and wellbeing and be a reason they disengage from systems like school or work. There may be times when you will need to advocate for a child in your care. It is important to name racism and understand its impact.

We are committed to increasing our ability to match children and young people from multicultural and/or multifaith backgrounds with culturally appropriate foster families by growing the number and diversity of kinship and foster carers from multicultural and/or multifaith backgrounds.



LGBTIQA+ children and young people

Research shows that supporting a child or young person in the exploration, development and expression of their identity is crucial for healthy child and adolescent development. It is also an important protective factor against poor health and wellbeing outcomes.

Research shows that LGBTIQA+ young people are overrepresented in homelessness statistics and experience high levels of rejection from family when they come out. LGBTIQA+ young people still experience bullying, harassment and discrimination at school, work and in public. These things all contribute to poorer outcomes for LGBTIQA+ young people.

As a foster carer you can play a fundamental role in creating a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment for children and young people to safely explore their identity. It is likely that when coming into a foster care placement it may be the first time that a young person has felt safe enough to do this. Your support and acceptance can play a crucial role in the life of a child or young person.

Berry Street's commitment to LGBTIQA+ communities is being formalised through the attainment of Rainbow Tick accreditation. This process means that Berry Street will review and implement practices that ensure the organisation is safe, welcoming, and inclusive for LGBTIQA+ staff, carers children, young people, and families.



Disability inclusive practice

Disability is a normal part of human diversity. However, our systems and structures have been designed in ways that create barriers for people with disability to access the services and supports they need. Berry Street has a commitment to supporting children and young people living with disability, including neurodiverse and autistic children and young people. Through our Access and Inclusion Plan we are working to build our capacity to identify, engage and support children and young people living with disability in kinship and foster care.

Children and young people with disabilities experience violence and abuse at higher rates than children without disabilities. We also know that there are many different types of disability and that for the children and young people who are part of Berry Street's services this can be complicated by experiences of trauma, abuse, and neglect. Often children and young people have not been properly assessed for disability and so have not had adequate supports in place.

As a foster carer you may have the opportunity to get to know the child or young person in your care and begin to understand the gaps in the supports available to them. There may be times when you will need to play an advocacy role for a child. It is important to always do this in consultation with the child.

Children and young people with disability can often have less agency and ability to advocate for their needs and the supports they need. This impacts on their healthy development and on their sense of control over their own lives. However, as a foster carer you can help to support meaningful participation in the family and community and create opportunities for a child or young person to have input into decisions about their own life, something that they may not have had the opportunity to do.

You can also promote disability in a positive and enabling way and help to dispel the many negative myths about disability which tell children and young people not to have aspirations and dreams for their lives. Like all children and young people, those with disability need to experience a range of settings and people, and they need to feel safe in physical and social spaces.



Learn more about [Berry Street's commitment to diversity and inclusion](#).

Berry Street's commitment to child safety

Berry Street is a child safe organisation. We believe all children and young people have an inherent right to grow up healthy, happy, and safe.

Berry Street is committed to providing a service that is culturally, spiritually, socially, and emotionally safe, as well as physically safe for children; where there is no challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need.

To keep children safe, we have zero tolerance for any form of child abuse or maltreatment within our organisation and across the programs we deliver. In addition, there is zero tolerance for not reporting suspected abuse or maltreatment.

To prevent abuse, Berry Street identifies risks children may face in different settings. This includes risks in the environment and risk of exploitation online. We are committed to removing and reducing all risks to children we work with. Our foster carers are required to hold a current Working with Children Check and are encouraged to undergo education relating to child safety and wellbeing.

Berry Street is committed to actioning the Victorian Child Standards and National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.



Learn more about the [Child Safe Standards](#).

Read [Berry Street's commitment to child safety](#).



Step-by-step guide to becoming a Berry Street foster carer

Our process guides you through everything you need to know about becoming a Berry Street foster carer. The process (from enquiry to accreditation) takes approximately six months. This may seem like a long time, but it's important we ensure that foster caring is right for you so children and young people, who cannot live safely at home, get the crucial support they need. **Ready to take the first step?**

1. Make an enquiry

Contact Berry Street to make an enquiry and find out more about Foster Care. We will chat with you about some of the fundamentals of what's involved in becoming a foster carer. As a part of the enquiry process, we will also send you a Berry Street Information Pack to provide more information.

2. Information Sharing Session

If you wish to progress your enquiry you will participate in an "information sharing session" with all members of your household. The information sharing session is delivered by Berry Street and is a great opportunity to find out more information. At the information sharing session Berry Street will answer any questions you may have and advise of the next steps in the process. Following the information session, if the timing is right for you (and us) we will invite you to register for training to progress your foster care enquiry journey.

3. Shared Lives Training Part 1

Prospective carers need to complete *Shared Lives* training, a two-part training package. The training program will provide information about the role of a foster carer and assist you and Berry Street to make an informed decision about progressing your foster care journey. Part 1 of the training comprises 8 modules to be covered over approximately 15 hours.

4. Assessment

After completing *Shared Lives Part 1* training, the next step is to start your formal assessment with one of our qualified assessors. The assessment involves multiple home visits for safety checks and interviews with all household members. The assessment process is a part of the continuing journey to make an informed decision to determine if foster care is a suitable option for you, your family & Berry Street. As a part of the assessment process, we'll explore your life experiences in detail, and the important carer attributes required to ensure children in care have a safe and supportive environment to grow and develop.



5. Panel

Your assessor will compile a report detailing your suitability to be considered for accreditation as a foster carer. The completed assessment report is presented to Berry Street's Foster Care accreditation panel, consisting of Berry Street staff and a Department of Families Fairness and Housing (DFFH) representative. This panel will make a decision about your application and if approved will recommend the most suitable care types for you and your family. You will learn of the accreditation outcome at the meeting.

6. Welcome to Berry Street

Congratulations – we're delighted that you'll be partnering with us to support children and young people on their journey. Now that you are accredited, we will arrange for you to complete *Shared Lives Part 2* training which is delivered over approximately 7 hours to help you prepare and welcome your first child or young person into your home.

Please note: All Berry Street carers are expected to complete Cultural training – *Nikara's Journey* – this is a two-day workshop delivered by the Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency (VACCA).

** Throughout the journey of becoming a carer there are important requirements for us to complete including background checks – Police Check & WWCC, medical checks, Home & Environment checks and speaking with members of your support network. Your assessor will work with you when the timing is right to complete these checks during different stages of the enquiry journey. Timely completion of the checks will be required to progress your foster care application.

More about the foster care assessment process

Does the assessment process involve doing tests?

The assessment process is designed to enable Berry Street and you to make an informed decision together, you will be given feedback throughout the process. This may include identifying issues that could impact on your ability to provide foster care.

What will the assessment sessions cover?

Because being a foster carer is such an important role you will be asked about many aspects of your life relevant to being a foster carer. We will look at your ability to:

- draw from and apply your own personal experiences to the tasks of fostering
- provide good quality day-to-day care for children and young people
- provide a safe and nurturing environment
- work with other people, particularly staff from Berry Street, other organisations and the parents and family of a child in your care

What does the medical check involve?

You will be asked to complete a health checklist and provide evidence that you are medically fit, including providing a medical report from your doctor.

The purpose of these checks is to determine if you have the physical and psychological health to undertake the role of fostering.

If any medical issue arises that may affect your suitability to foster, it will be discussed with you fully. Together we will assess the potential impact on children or young people in your care and your wellbeing.

What does the home and environment check involve?

As part of the assessment at least one home visit will be conducted to undertake a home and environment check. This is a check to ensure that you can provide a home that is physically safe and suitable.

The check will also be undertaken if you have a secondary property, where you will regularly spend time, such as a holiday or weekend home.

The home and environment check is reviewed on an annual basis as part of re-accreditation process or if you change addresses.

What should your references cover?

You will be asked to provide the names of three unrelated people who have known you for at least two years, and with whom you are still in contact. They need to be able to comment on your experience and ability to care for children and your personal character. Your referees must have observed and be able to comment on your interaction with children.

What background safety checks are done?

You need to provide a current Working with Children Check number for all adult members of your household (18 years and above).

Berry Street must also undertake National Police History Checks of all people in your household or staying on your property who are 18 years or above, and those who regularly stay overnight.

National Police History Checks are renewed every three years and Working with Child Checks are renewed every five years.

If you or other adult household member has spent 12 months or more overseas during the past 10 years, an international police check will be required.

Having a criminal record does not automatically disqualify you or a family member from fostering. However, any criminal convictions that affect your ability to care safely for a child or young person will mean your application will not be able to proceed.

Other background checks that will be conducted include any contact with other agencies where you, or members of your household, have previously applied or been accredited as carers, and if you have previously been disqualified as a carer.

Can I appeal my application to be a foster carer if it is not approved by the agency?

Yes. You are entitled to be given reasons why your application has not been accredited and have the decision reviewed by Berry Street. You are entitled to see all the material collected in the process of assessment, except for personal references which may be treated as confidential.

More about foster care placements and how they work

When a child or young person is temporarily placed in your care within your home, this is a 'placement.'

Through the accreditation process, you'll receive a recommendation for the type of care that is best suited to you and your family. The type of care you are accredited to provide can evolve over time and be reviewed annually. Our team will work with you to match you with the right child or young person. However, you are always able to decide whether to accept a placement or not.

We endeavour to provide a sound overview of the child or young person's history before they come into your care. However, this is not always possible, especially for a child or young person needing emergency care.

Once you welcome a child or young person into your home, Berry Street will work closely with you to ensure the needs of the child or young person are met and that the child or young person settles into your home smoothly.

Financial support

Foster carers receive financial support in the form of a tax-free fortnightly caregiver reimbursement, paid by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH).

The fortnightly reimbursement rate is based on the age of the child and the complexity of the child's care needs. It does not cover the full cost of raising a child, rather it is seen as a contribution towards these costs. Foster carers may also be eligible for Centrelink benefits to assist in covering the costs of supporting a child or young person.

Carer Village

As the African proverb goes, it takes a village to raise a child. Many people are needed in a child's life to ensure positive relationships and a safe, secure, and healthy environment.

As a newly accredited foster carer with Berry Street, you will be part of our Carer Village, a connected and supportive community of qualified Berry Street staff and other carers. You'll also have access to a range of social, learning and support initiatives to help carers connect and thrive.

We are so appreciative of the special work our foster carers do and we find innovative and practical ways to say thank you. From local morning teas to private screenings at the cinema and social opportunities to connect with other Berry Street carers. We always want our carers to know they are valued, supported and part of something much bigger.

Ongoing support

Whether it's your first day as a foster carer or you've been fostering for years, Berry Street will be with you every step of the way. We never want you to feel like you're doing this on your own. You will be supported by Berry Street's highly experienced staff as well as our volunteers and the wider foster care community.

Berry Street also operates a state-wide after-hours emergency support and helpline. This service is available between 17:00-09:00, Monday to Friday and 24 hours on weekends and public holidays.

Sometimes our carers may need general advice and guidance or are trying to navigate a tricky situation with a child or young person in their care. We know that not everything happens during business hours. It is important that our carers know that support and assistance is only a phone call away.

Taking a break (respite care)

Be it for a night, a weekend, or the school holidays, everyone benefits from taking a break. We provide a flexible and tailored approach to respite care and focus on a solution that is best for the child or young person. Therefore, respite care may look different across each household.

Through respite care, the children in your care will be temporarily placed in the care of another accredited Berry Street carer. Respite care is always done in the best interests of the child or young person and is designed to strengthen their social networks and relationships while also providing a break for foster carers.

Health and wellbeing

The wellbeing of our foster carers is super important. To encourage wellbeing Berry Street provides access to our EAP support program and wellbeing gateway. This program allows for access to highly skilled and experienced allied health specialists who can provide short-term, practical support to assist with the management of a wide range of life issues. It also includes access to an online portal of mental health and wellbeing resources which is available 24 hours, seven days a week.

What is expected of Berry Street foster carers?

Ongoing learning and development opportunities

When you become a foster carer with Berry Street you will be supported with a range of learning and development opportunities to better support the children and young people in your care. Our training suite includes practical skills such as CPR and First Aid, as well as training across child development and trauma.

Berry Street asks that our foster carers are committed to ongoing learning as we know that this increases carer wellbeing, confidence and supports relationships between young people and their carers. As a Berry Street foster carer, we have an expectation that all foster carers complete a minimum of at least two learning or development activities each year.

Reflective practice

Being a foster carer can be quite challenging at times.

At Berry Street we cultivate a culture of reflective practice and continuous learning as it is shown to benefit children and young people who have experienced trauma. Reflective practice is the capacity to reflect on one's actions, thoughts and behaviours and engage in a process of continuous learning.

Advocacy

As one of Australia's largest independent family services organisations, we work with government and community to ensure children, young people, their families, and our carers are at the centre of positive change, progress, and recognition.

We work to influence and inform sector wide transformation that is evidence based and in the best interests of children and young people.



Learn more about the [campaigns Berry Street is currently supporting](#).

Victorian Foster Care Charter

As a foster carer with Berry Street, you will be asked to sign and commit to the [Victorian Foster Care Charter](#) each year.

As a foster carer, your responsibilities are to:

- put the best interests of the child or young person first
- provide a safe and nurturing home
- respect and proactively maintain a child or young person's connections to family, community, and culture, according to their case plan
- support the permanency objective for the child or young person
- provide culturally appropriate care to children and young people who are Aboriginal or from culturally diverse backgrounds
- encourage the child or young person's learning and educational achievement
- support the child or young person's wishes and views and advocate for their healthy development
- maintain open communication with other care team members to keep them informed
- uphold the child or young person's, and their family's right to privacy
- fulfil your role within the care team and understand the role of other care team members
- actively seek opportunities to develop your skills and knowledge to care for the child or young person
- actively participate in developing the Care and Placement Plan, and other Looking After Children tools.

As a foster carer, you can expect your agency and/or the department to:

- action your needs as soon as possible, to assist you in caring for the child or young person
- include you in planning and seek your views in care team meetings
- consider and respect the health and wellbeing, culture and religion of you and your family
- consider your safety when planning about the disclosure of your address to parents of the child or young person
- provide timely information to you about court decisions and other issues that affect you and the child or young person in your care
- establish regular channels of communication with you and provide you with important documentation, such as the instrument of authorisation and cultural plans
- give prompt advice to you about changes to contact arrangements
- provide all relevant available information to enable you to make an informed choice about caring for a child or young person
- respond to issues and complaints in a timely manner, and treat you fairly
- manage quality of care matters with sensitivity and understanding of the emotional impact on you and your family.

Foster Carer Association of Victoria

Upon accreditation, you will be eligible to join the [Foster Care Association of Victoria](#) (FCAV), the peak body for foster care in Victoria. As a FCAV member you will have access to free advocacy, support, and information.

Take the next step in your foster care journey

When you partner with Berry Street and welcome a child or young person into your home – whether that is for a few days, weeks, or months – you'll be playing a vital role in supporting their journey.

With your time and care, you can encourage and empower a child or young person who has experienced trauma to grow, develop and feel safe.

Take the next step in your foster care journey today. Become a Berry Street foster carer: berrystreet.org.au/fostercare



Contact our Foster Care Recruitment Team

berrystreet.org.au/fostercare



Berry Street acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands, skies and waterways across Australia. We recognise that we operate on stolen land and that sovereignty was never ceded. We are committed to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in our care to connect to their cultures, countries and communities.



Berry Street is committed to the principles of social justice. Berry Street supports the LGBTIQ+ community and celebrates diversity.